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UNDERSTANDING AMERICA

UNDERSTANDING OTHER NATIONS

National Endowment for the Humanities

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NF 3.2:

DESPITE the resurgence of interest in basic education, young Americans appear to know little of their own heritage and of the cultures of foreign nations. Without an understanding of the history, principles, trials, and successes of this country, our students can never be effective citizens; they can never contribute to the kind of responsible self-government that democracies demand. Similarly, without some basic knowledge of the languages and literatures of other nations, Americans cannot hope to develop a deeper understanding of the heritage of those nations.

In an effort to reinvigorate the teaching and learning of American history and literature and to encourage the restoration of foreign language literacy in America, the National Endowment for the Humanities is establishing two initiatives: *Understanding America* and *Understanding Other Nations*.

Through the initiative for *Understanding America*, the Endowment is encouraging proposals that will help us recapture for ourselves and our posterity an understanding of the heritage of this country — the principles that fashioned it, the events that shaped it, the people who built it, and the writers, poets, and painters who have reflected on it.

The emphasis of the *Understanding Other Nations* initiative is on foreign languages, the traditional entry point into the study of foreign cultures. Through knowledge of a foreign language, we can begin to understand the literary, philosophical, and historical traditions that distinguish one nation from another.

Under both of these initiatives, the Endowment welcomes proposals dealing not only with scholarship and education, but also with conferences, museum exhibitions, library programs, television and radio productions, and the broad dissemination of the best scholarly research and educational programming.

The two initiatives will be carried out in all divisions of the Endowment as part of the agency's regular grant-making programs. Prospective applicants should therefore call or write the division whose guidelines appear most appropriate to the character of the proposed project. If there are questions about the appropriate division to which a particular proposal should be submitted, applicants should call or write Jeffrey Thomas, the staff coordinator for these initiatives, at 202/786-0420, National Endowment for the Humanities,Room 403, 1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20506.

Division guidelines may be obtained from the appropriate division or from the

Public Affairs Office
National Endowment for the Humanities
Room 409
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20506
202/786-0438

The following are examples of the types of projects that might be supported by each division.

Division of Education Programs

THIS division supports a wide variety of projects aimed at improving humanities education at all levels of schooling, both public and private.

In connection with the *Understanding America* initiative, the division welcomes a variety of applications, including proposals that

- develop collaborations among colleges, universities, and local schools in an attempt to achieve greater coherence in American history and American literature offerings;
- assist schools and school systems that want to strengthen the content and caliber of their American history courses, so that history becomes a central component of the curriculum rather than a subject subsumed under broader social studies headings;
- restructure course offerings in colleges and universities to equip future teachers with the breadth of knowledge necessary to teach their students the full sweep of American history and American literature;
- integrate the best of recent scholarship on particular groups — immigrants, minorities, and women — into the more traditional course offerings on American history and literature, thus emphasizing both the diversity and the unity of the American experience; and
- offer institutes for elementary and secondary school teachers and administrators and institutes for college and university faculty on texts and topics related to significant aspects of the American experience.

In support of the *Understanding Other Nations* component of this initiative, the division encourages proposals to do such things as

- establish consortia and other collaborative efforts that encourage colleges, high schools, and elementary schools to work toward sequential and coherent language offerings on a regional basis;
- sponsor institutes for elementary and secondary school teachers in foreign languages and texts;
- expand course offerings in existing language centers and departments to include the study of foreign texts in such disciplines as history and philosophy;
- develop programs that offer language instruction and area studies to adult learners where educational needs cannot be met through the traditional structures of higher education; and
- establish study centers, both in this country and abroad, to promote intensive work in the language and culture of other nations.

Division of Fellowships and Seminars

THE Division of Fellowships and Seminars supports individual scholarship in the humanities disciplines and provides opportunities for the collegial study of humanities topics and texts.

As part of the *Understanding America* initiative, the division has established a new category of support, Fellowships in the Foundations of American Society, to be conducted through two of its regular programs: Fellowships for University Teachers, and Fellowships for College Teachers and Independent Scholars. Applicants under this category are encouraged to seek support for scholarly work on the history, literature, and founding principles of this nation. Proposals may deal directly with the events and achievements of the founding period; they may treat later works that reflect on the concerns and principles of the period; or they may explore events, works, or schools of thought that are significant for understanding the full sweep of the American experience. Applicants to this special program are further encouraged to propose the preparation of textbooks, anthologies, and special editions of major American writings that could be used at the high school or undergraduate level.

Both summer seminar programs — for college teachers and for secondary school teachers — are also prepared to increase offerings in American history and literature. A seminar for college teachers, for example, might focus on the influence southern writers have had on the development of the modern American novel. A seminar for secondary school teachers could study Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* for its insights into the character of American life.

Other division programs also emphasize *Understanding America*. Under the Younger Scholars Program, a high school student might pursue a study of the role of the Virginia delegation at the Constitutional Convention. A Summer Stipend applicant might propose to complete the manuscript of a book about the role American filmmakers played in defining the American character in the years following the Second World War, and a Travel to Collections award could enable a scholar to investigate important biographical documents housed at a state historical society.

The division is also encouraging proposals under all its programs in the *Understanding Other Nations* initiative. A seminar for either college or secondary school teachers could focus, for example, on the key texts of modern Mexican literature. Seminars might be conducted entirely in the language of the culture under study; they might offer intensive study of a masterwork from another culture in translation; or they might focus on fundamental problems of interpretation that arise in translating texts.

An appropriate topic for Fellowships for University Teachers, or for Fellowships for College Teachers and Independent Scholars, might be an examination of the Chinese texts that were central to a Confucian education. Under the Younger Scholars Program a college student might write, in French, an analysis of the importance of irony in the novels of nineteenth-century French writers.

Division of General Programs

THE division supports projects designed to increase public understanding of the humanities. Toward this end, the division supports exhibitions at museums and historical organizations, reading and discussion groups in libraries, production of humanities programs for television and radio, and lectures, conferences, and symposia at colleges, universities, and other organizations.

In response to the *Understanding America* initiative, a filmmaker applying under the Humanities Projects in Media Program could propose to produce a major series on the founding of the American colonies or on the central events of the Civil War. Similarly, a radio station could propose to develop programs on the Constitutional Convention and the ratification debates.

In an application submitted to the Humanities Projects in Museums Program, a history museum, using the museum's copies of historical documents and related collections, could propose to mount an exhibition on the theme of "becoming a nation." A library applying under the Public Humanities Projects Program could propose to collaborate with a nearby college to develop a weekly lecture series, or film and book discussion programs, on the significance of the frontier in American history.

Division of Research Programs

THE division provides support for long-term and collaborative research projects in the humanities, the preparation of reference works and editions, the organization of research materials, and the subvention of publication expenses.

In response to the *Understanding America* initiative, an applicant to the Editions Program might propose to edit the collected works of a major American writer, which will then be published in both a scholarly edition and a popular paperback form for schools and the general public. A proposal to the Reference Materials Program might involve the preparation of an historical atlas of America at the time of the Civil War, or during the period following the Louisiana Purchase, suitable for use both by scholars and

by students in undergraduate history courses. Or under the Conferences category, an applicant may seek support for a conference on the effects of the Great Depression or of the Cold War on American literary traditions. Through the Interpretive Research Program an applicant might propose to employ archival methods and interviews to investigate the patterns of assimilation of twentieth-century South Asian immigrants.

In connection with the *Understanding Other Nations* initiative, an applicant might seek support from the Translations category for a new translation of a seminal historical text of Eastern Europe in the medieval period. A proposal to the Reference Materials Program might involve the preparation of an up-to-date dictionary of a Chinese regional dialect that is considered important to an understanding of that culture. Through the Interpretive Research Program an applicant might propose a study of the traditional poetry of an area of the world whose literature is largely inaccessible to American scholars not conversant with the language spoken there.

Division of State Programs

HUMANITIES councils operating in each state, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands receive grants from this division to develop and support locally initiated projects and programs for the public in history, literature, philosophy, and other disciplines of the humanities. Each state council establishes its own grant guidelines and application deadlines. The state councils support a wide variety of projects in the humanities, including library reading programs, speaker discussion series, conferences, seminars and institutes for teachers, media presentations, and museum and traveling exhibitions.

Applicants responding to the *Understanding America* initiative might submit an application to the appropriate state humanities council to conduct an institute for teachers on rural themes in American literature, or on the Declaration of Independence and American literature. Applicants might also propose to develop a course for high school students on western American history, on the history of the state, or on American Studies integrating American history and literature from colonial times to 1900. To reach adult audiences, applicants might propose a reading and discussion series on major southern writers, or on major themes in American literature.

Proposals submitted to state humanities councils in response to the initiative on *Understanding Other Nations* might include an intensive summer institute on French, Spanish, or German language and literature, or a teachers' institute on Chinese and Japanese literature. Applicants

might also propose a workshop for high school teachers of Spanish focusing on the literary traditions of Spain.

Office of Challenge Grants

CHALLENGE grants are awarded to improve the financial stability of a college, university, museum, historical organization, research or public library, public media station, or university press so that the recipient organization may reach or sustain excellence in its humanities programs, collections, and research. These grants require recipients to raise three times the offered federal funds in new or increased contributions from nonfederal sources.

Challenge grant applicants responding to either or both of the two initiatives might include as part of their application a request for support for endowed positions in American history or foreign languages, especially in strategically important but less commonly taught languages; endowments to support faculty and curriculum development in these disciplines; endowed funds for increased library acquisitions to strengthen collections in American history or in the seminal texts in foreign languages; the purchase of instructional equipment for use in history and foreign language classrooms; renovation of buildings used to house pertinent exhibitions, collections or archives; and endowments for the development and support of educational programs based on such collections.

Office of Preservation

THIS office supports projects that address the physical deterioration of humanities resources, particularly books, journals, newspapers, manuscripts, documents, maps, drawings, plans, photographs, film, and tapes. Much of the work supported by this office is directly related to the two initiatives as the preservation of such resources is vital to an understanding of our own past and of foreign cultures. Grants cover a wide range of projects, from the preservation of a major university's collection of the works of a seminal American author to the training of book conservators and preservation administrators.

Prospective applicants are encouraged to call or write the office to discuss projects related to these two initiatives.

Equal Opportunity
Endowment programs do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, handicap, or age. For further information, write to the director, Office of Equal Opportunity, National Endowment for the Humanities, Washington, D.C. 20506.

P 86-10

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